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Muslim-Christian Relations and Peacemaking in the Arab World¹

by Jon Hoover

Muslims and Christians in the Contemporary Arab World

The Arab world extends from Mauritania in the west to Iraq and Oman in the east and is home to some 300 million people. Most of these are Sunni Muslims, but there are Shi‘i majorities in Iraq and Bahrain and sizable Shi‘i minorities in Lebanon, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Most Muslims in Oman belong to a third group called the Ibadis. Whether Sunni, Shi‘i or Ibadi, the Muslims of the region vary widely in spirituality, culture and political persuasion, and some have secularized. The Christians of the Arab World are found mainly in Egypt and the Levant. Egypt’s Christians, known as Copts, are the largest in number, comprising 6–10 percent of the country’s 80 million people. The vast majority is Coptic Orthodox, although there are important Coptic Catholic and Coptic Evangelical (Protestant) communities as well. Lebanon has the highest ratio of Christians to Muslims, with 30–35 percent of the 4 million population adhering to an array of Christian confessions, the largest being the Maronite (Catholic aligned with Rome) and then the Greek Orthodox. Christians make up about 10 percent of the population in Syria, and there are significant minorities of Christians in Jordan, Iraq, and Palestine/Israel and much smaller groups in North Africa. Also, good numbers of both Arab and non-Arab Christians are found among the millions of migrant workers in the Gulf countries.² The Christians of the Arab world vary widely in their religiosity and political commitments just as Muslims do. What is consistent across the board however is that religion constitutes a legal and political identity into which one is born. Religion is not simply a matter of faith commitment as it is for many in other parts of the world.

¹ I would like to thank Jacqueline Hoover for reviewing an earlier draft and drawing my attention to sources on Egypt.

² For detail on religious demographics, see the 2009 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life report, “Mapping the Global Muslim Population,” and the religion entries under national population in the online CIA World Fact Book. For introductions to the major Christian groups in the region, see O’Mahony and Loosley 2010. For a survey of research on Christianity in the region, see Robson 2011.

The Egyptian revolution of January 25, 2011 helpfully motivates the dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations within this complex demographic and political reality. Egyptian Christians and Muslims joined together in peaceful demonstrations against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Moreover, the security vacuum precipitated by the besieged government's withdrawal of police from their posts and release of criminals from prisons drew ordinary people out into the streets of Cairo to protect their neighborhoods from harm. Suspicion between Christian and Muslim neighbors dissipated as they met—some for the first time—and worked together to give order to their local affairs. It was a proud moment for Muslim-Christian unity in Egypt.

Yet, with the resignation of President Mubarak more than two weeks later on February 11, Egyptians found themselves facing a profoundly difficult question: What kind of nation did they want to become? It was clear to everyone that an amended constitution must limit the number of presidential terms. No president could serve thirty years again. But what about the constitution's second article, which specified that Islam was the religion of the state and the principles of Shari'a the chief source of law?³ Some secular intellectuals and a few Christian leaders called for removal of this article and establishment of a secular state that made no distinction on the basis of religion. Not only would this abolish the preferential place given to Islam in Egypt; it would also grant legal status to adherents of all religions or none, not just Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Muslim voices ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups to leading officials of the renowned al-Azhar University quickly drowned out this call for a secular state, and Christian leaders cautioned their followers not to expect too much from the revolutionary moment. By the end of February 2011, the Islamic identity of Egypt as a legal fact was no longer in serious question.⁴

These events reveal two competing accounts of Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt: one of national unity and the other of Islamic precedence. The Egyptian national unity narrative asserts that Christians and Muslims live and work harmoniously side by side as equal citizens in society. This discourse has a venerable tradition in Egypt going back at least to the secular nationalist ideology of the Wafd party and its drive for Egyptian independence from the British in the late 1910s and early 1920s. In more recent decades, the former Egyptian government and numerous Muslim and Christian intellectuals frequently underlined national unity to alleviate pressure from assertive Islamism (Hasan 2003; Makari 2007; Scott 2010). That so much was made of Christian-Muslim unity in

³ Article 2 of the Constitution of Egypt reads in full, "Islam is the religion of the state. Arabic is the official language. The principles of the Islamic Shari'a are the chief source of legislation" (as of April, 28, 2011). This is my translation of the Arabic text. The new Egyptian constitution of 1971 was the first to indicate that the Shari'a was a chief source of legislation. This was amended in 1980 to say that the Shari'a was the chief source.

⁴ The archives of the Arab West Report, 2011, Weeks 5–9 (<http://www.arabwestreport.info/>), provide thorough documentation of these events.

the 2011 Egyptian revolution speaks in fact of a crisis in Egypt's national unity narrative at the hands of an alternative vision of society giving precedence to Islam.

The Islamic precedence narrative insists that Islam be the defining constituent of the Egyptian state. As we will see below, Muslims enjoyed political control over the Arab world and beyond from very early in their history, and this heritage inspires Islamists of various kinds in contemporary Egypt to advance the cause of Muslim priority. The flip side of Muslim assertions of precedence is a Coptic story of victimization in the face of discriminatory laws and social practices. Yet, Muslims also complain of victimization at the hands of the more powerful West, especially the United States, which is seen to undermine Muslim interests and give unstinting support to the state of Israel.

Similar tensions around Christian-Muslim coexistence, Muslim precedence and external interference appear elsewhere in the Arab World today, and I will return later in this chapter to touch on the case of modern Lebanon. The intervening discussion traces the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the Arab world from the beginnings of Islam to the present. My purpose overall is to explain how Christians and Muslims have lived together and to set the stage for peacemaking efforts that might ameliorate some of the injustice, insecurity, and sectarianism that plague their ongoing interaction.

Muslims and Christians in the Early Islamic Era

The strong religious identities characteristic of Muslims and Christians in the Arab world have their roots in late antiquity and the emergence of religions making universal claims and maintaining clear communal boundaries through religious ritual, moral comportment, polemics, and occasionally violence. The main religions of late antiquity were Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity, and paganism. Paganism and Manichaeism both lasted several centuries into the Muslim era before dying out. Zoroastrianism was the dualistic national religion of Persia and the religion of the Sasanian Empire, which stretched from southern Iraq eastward beyond Persia. Zoroastrianism declined rapidly under Islam, but a small community of Zoroastrians remains.

Judaism in the ancient world was missionary through the late 300s, and Jews spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and into Egypt, Iraq, and Arabia. With the rise of the rabbis in Babylonia/Iraq, Judaism gave increasing attention to polemic against Christianity and clarifying the boundaries of its community. This coincided with polemic from the Christian side and the increasing size and power of the Christian community, especially following the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312. Egypt was 80 percent Christian by the early 400s, and Christians probably constituted the largest religious community in Iraq by the late 500s. Christianity expanded eastward even

after the seventh-century Arab conquests with Nestorian missions through the 1200s. There were also communities of Jews through the 300s who worshiped Jesus yet rejected the label “Christian.” However, the ever-sharpening boundary between Jew and Christian eventually deprived these communities of their viability (Berkey 2003, 10-38).

The work of Thomas Sizgorich provides insight into how Christians of late antiquity buttressed their identities. He observes that Christian clergy preached against Judaism to curb Christian fascination with Jewish synagogues as repositories of sacred power, and he focuses especially on the role of militant monks in preserving the gains of earlier Christian martyrs for the faith. From the fourth century onward, the monks in their extreme piety and asceticism became the new martyrs, and some took to violent intervention to reestablish blurring borders either between Jews and Christians or between orthodox Christians and heretics. Sizgorich sees in these warrior monks a precedent for the ascetic *jihadis* of early Islam, a matter to which I will return below (Sizgorich 2009, 21-143).

Islam emerged into this world of well-bounded religious communities in the early 600s. In the traditional Muslim account, the Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation of the Qur’an in 610 and formed a group of followers in the west Arabian city of Mecca adhering to the monotheistic religion of Islam. The young Muslim community eventually suffered persecution at the hands of the Meccan polytheistic elite and thus emigrated from Mecca to Medina in 622. In Medina the Muslim community matured into a viable political entity, removed the Jews from their midst on charges of treachery, and eventually conquered Mecca in 629. Following Muhammad’s death in 632, Arab armies advanced rapidly throughout the Near East—under God’s blessing according to early Muslim sources—to open up new lands for Islam. The Sasanian Empire of Iraq and Persia fell rapidly. The Byzantine Empire, the bastion of what is now Greek Orthodox Christianity, quickly lost Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, but remained strong in Anatolia and southeastern Europe for centuries to come. The center of Muslim power shifted firmly from Arabia to Damascus with the Umayyad caliphate (661–750), and then to Baghdad in 750 with the Abbasid caliphate.

In the traditional account of Islamic origins, Islam and the Muslim community appear clearly delineated from rival religious traditions from the outset. Historians are not agreed that this is exactly what happened, and alternative proposals have been set forth. For example Fred Donner has suggested that the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632) led not only Arab pagans but also Jews and Christians in an ecumenical revival movement of “Believers” that called for rigorous monotheism and then rapidly conquered the ancient Near East. In Donner’s account the “Believers” movement only became a clearly separate community of Muslims under the reign of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 705) who built the Dome of the Rock in 691–692 on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem to claim space sacred to Judaism and overshadow the Church of the Holy Sepulcher sacred to Christians. It is at

this point, not before, that Islam was clearly distinguished from Christianity and Judaism (Donner 2010).⁵ Whether Islam emerged in accord with the traditional Muslim narrative or developed along lines closer to a theory like Donner's, Muslims eventually did come to resemble their religious counterparts in late antiquity. They had their own distinctive beliefs, rites of worship, patterns of life, and polemics against other religions to demarcate their community from the others. One could not be a Jewish or Christian follower of Muhammad; there were only Muslim adherents of Islam.

The work of Sizgorich mentioned above highlights two different Muslim strategies for fortifying this identity, both with precedents in the Christianity of late antiquity. Sizgorich argues that Muslims found in the trope of the Christian monk-warrior a model for the ascetic piety of their *jihad* fighters who spread Islamic rule from Spain to central Asia in the first Islamic century and thereafter vigilantly guarded the frontier with the Byzantine Empire. It was the piety of the *jihadi* that brought God's blessing in war against the unbeliever. In words attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, "Every community has its monasticism, and the monasticism of my community is *jihad* for the sake of God" (Sizgorich 2009, 144–95).⁶ Sizgorich observes that the asceticism of the *jihadis* also rendered them exemplars of piety for city-dwellers just as much as for those living at the frontiers. However, turning *jihadi* violence inward against wayward Muslims or even against the non-Muslim majority living under Muslim rule could well have destroyed the Muslim community (Sizgorich 2009, 196–230).⁷ Another way of marking religious boundaries within Muslim domains had to be found, and here Sizgorich turns to the example of the Baghdadi religious scholar Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) was a stern ascetic famous for his steadfast resistance to the Inquisition (*mihna*) of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun. The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs claimed the right to speak for Islam, but scholars of prophetic traditions and law (functionally equivalent to Jewish rabbis) slowly gained strength and challenged caliphal religious authority. Al-Ma'mun imposed his Inquisition in 833 to silence these scholars. Most acquiesced, but Ibn Hanbal held out despite imprisonment and torture. The Inquisition came to naught in the late 840s, and the caliphal prerogative to define Islam was broken for good. Religious authority now resided firmly with the scholars; the job of the caliph or Muslim ruler was reduced to protecting the teaching and practice of Islam, defending his borders, and administrating the political affairs of his domain. With this it

⁵ For a critique of Donner, see Crone, August 10, 2010.

⁶ The tradition is quoted in Sizgorich 2009, 161 and 180, from a collection of 'Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak (d. 797).

⁷ Sizgorich explains that this was the threat posed by the Kharijis. The Kharijis emerged in the first Muslim civil war of 656–661 and violently attacked Muslims who deviated from the rigorous standards of their own belief and practice.

may be said that the Islamic community achieved the separation of religion from the state.⁸

Ibn Hanbal's vision of Islamic faith and identity was challenged not only by caliphal power but also by the daily interchange between religious communities. The early Muslim conquerors did not require their new subjects to convert to Islam, and Muslims were not yet a majority in Iraq in Ibn Hanbal's day. Thus, interaction with non-Muslims was an inevitable part of Ibn Hanbal's world. Sizgorich vividly portrays the "cultural clutter" that Ibn Hanbal faced:

[Muslims of Ibn Hanbal's time] had Christian mothers, Jewish fathers, Magian neighbors, non-Muslim comrades on raiding expeditions against the enemies of Islam, non-Muslim partners in business, Christian slaves, Christian lovers, Jewish clients, and Magian students . . . The intimacy of Muslim and non-Muslim ran from the battlefields of the Syrian frontier to the *suqs* [markets], bedrooms, and birthing places of the Muslim world (Sizgorich 2009, 259).

In the midst of this plurality, Sizgorich explains, Ibn Hanbal permitted interacting with non-Muslims for humanitarian purposes but yet prescribed practices aimed at protecting the boundaries of Muslim identity. A Muslim could greet a Christian or Jew, but not with the Muslim greeting of "peace." Muslims could visit with Christians and Jews, but only with the intention to invite them to Islam. A Muslim could bury a non-Muslim, but not perform a funeral prayer for him. Ibn Hanbal also enjoined Muslims to upbraid each other in the event that one of their number transgressed these bounds. This served as well to tighten the bonds of communal solidarity but without resort to violence against outsiders. Sizgorich observes that Ahmad ibn Hanbal's approach is much in the spirit of good fences making good neighbors, with Muslim-affirming practices providing the fences from behind which Muslims could interact closely with non-Muslims without jeopardizing their distinctive identity (Sizgorich 2009, 254-71).

Ibn Hanbal's nonviolent approach to boundary maintenance through distinctive practice has resonated with numerous Muslims down through history, and it opens the door to conceiving Muslim identity as primarily communal rather than territorial. However, Ibn Hanbal himself was embedded in a wider story of Muslim territorial conquest, political dominance, and religious superiority that classified non-Muslims as protected peoples (*ahl al-dhimma* / *dhimmis*) and subjected them to various encumbrances. The *dhimmi* was distinguished primarily by payment of an annual poll tax (*jizya*) to the Muslim ruler, which was interpreted both as remuneration for protection services—*dhimmis* were exempt from military duties—and as punishment for not

⁸ On the Inquisition, see further Nawas 1994; Nawas, 1996; and Lapidus 1975.

converting to Islam. Christians and Jews were also subject to Islamic blasphemy laws and regulations preventing their men from marrying Muslim women.

A document called the Pact of 'Umar outlined further obligations and restrictions on Christians. This pact presents itself as a Christian surrender agreement before the second Sunni caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644), but it probably dates later to the eighth or ninth century. The Pact of 'Umar stipulates that Christians should treat Muslims with deference, limit the public display of Christian worship, distinguish themselves from Muslims in clothing, not proselytize, not prevent conversion to Islam, and not build new churches (Levy-Rubin 2009; Freidenreich 2009; Friedmann 2003). While application of the Pact of 'Umar through the Islamic middle periods was often lax, it proved especially useful for reigning in Christians during periods of sectarian tension, and its conditions became standard features in manuals of medieval Islamic law.

Although Christians in the Arab Middle East were disadvantaged politically in the early Islamic centuries, many continued to flourish culturally and religiously. Moreover, Muslims needed the skills of the non-Muslims in their midst as scribes, doctors, and scholars. Most famously, the Christian doctor and philosopher Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 873) led the Abbasid-financed movement to translate Greek medical and philosophical texts into Arabic. This gave rise to both Christian and Muslim philosophical discourse in Arabic and prepared the way for the transmission of the Greek philosophical tradition from Arabic to Latin in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe. Christians also developed their own liturgies and theologies in Arabic, and they exchanged apologetic and polemic with Muslims over matters of prophecy and the nature of God. Christian apologists addressed especially the Muslim rejection of the core Christian doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation and neutralized Muslim claims for Muhammad's definitive prophethood. Muslims for their part found Muhammad prophesied in the Bible and appropriated much Jewish and Christian biblical lore into an Islamic framework. Each community developed ways to retain its own theological integrity and blunt the truth claims of the other (Griffith 2008; Bertaina 2011).

While the churches of the Arab Middle East survive to the present day, Christianity eventually disappeared from North Africa west of Egypt. The Islamic advance across North Africa in the late 600s and early 700s encountered opposition from Berber tribes, some of whom were Christians. Substantial Christian communities remained for several centuries after the coming of Islam, but over the course of time some Christians converted to Islam while many others immigrated to Europe. The last trace of indigenous Christian presence comes from Tunisia and dates to the early 1400s (Talbi 1990; Courbage and Fargues 1997, 29-43; Speight 1995). Christianity returned to North Africa in the 1800s following French colonization.

Muslims and Christians from the Islamic Middle Periods to Modernity

Returning to the Arab Middle East, Abbasid power declined from Ibn Hanbal's day onward, and the Buyids, supporters of Twelver Shi'ism, took control of Iraq in 945. The Fatimids, who were Isma'ili Shi'is, conquered Egypt in 969 from their base in Tunisia. The Byzantine Empire revived and reconquered parts of Syria in the late 900s. For the most part the Buyids and Fatimids allowed Christians and Jews to thrive and Sunni Muslims to continue in their confession. In Egypt Christians still constituted nearly half of the population, and they exercised considerable power over the administration of the country. However, the Fatimid ruler Al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah (d. 1021) was exceedingly harsh with both Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, and he gained notoriety even in Europe for his persecution of Christians and his destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in 1009. He nonetheless employed Christian scribes, a practice that rulers in Egypt continued into the 1300s (Samir 1996; Thomas 2010).⁹ In 1055 the Turkish Seljuqs displaced the Buyids in Baghdad and threw their weight behind Sunni Islam to counter the Fatimids. The Seljuqs also defeated the Byzantines decisively at Manzikert in eastern Anatolia in 1071.

Al-Hakim's destruction of the Holy Sepulcher and the Byzantine loss to the Seljuqs set the stage for the Crusades from the west. The Byzantine emperor called on Rome for help, and Pope Urban II responded by preaching the First Crusade in 1095 with the express purpose of liberating Christian pilgrimage destinations from the Muslims.¹⁰ The Seljuqs had weakened by this time, and the First Crusade captured Jerusalem in 1099. The crusaders set up a series of states along the Levantine coast, but further crusades in the following two centuries achieved little. There was much cultural and economic exchange between the crusaders and the Muslims, and open conflict was the exception rather than the rule (Dajani-Shakeel 1990; Dajani-Shakeel 1995). Nonetheless, the crusading movement hardened Latin Christian hostility toward Muslims, poisoned relations between Muslims and eastern Christians, and eventually evoked a Muslim revival of *jihad* among the Ayyubid dynasty in Syria. The renowned Ayyubid Salah al-Din (Saladin) supplanted the Fatimids in 1171 and captured Jerusalem from the crusaders in 1187. The Mamluks then came to power in Egypt and Syria in 1260 and drove out the last crusaders from the Levant in 1302 (Riley-Smith 1991; Hillenbrand 1999).

⁹ For an account of Al-Hakim's reign by the medieval historian al-Maqrizi, see Lewis 1974, 46–59.

¹⁰ The readiness of Western Christians to undertake such a massive enterprise requires explanation beyond that of Muslim control of Christian holy places and a Byzantine cry for help. Mastnak 2002, 1–54, 96–117, plausibly argues that the Crusades emerged from the western church's efforts to limit violence among Christians and channel it toward pious ends externally. Out of this crystallized the notion of western Christendom set against Islam as the normative adversary. Other explanations are surveyed in Housley 2006, 24–47.

While the Crusades were a tragic moment in medieval Christian-Muslim relations, much more momentous were the Mongol invasions from the east. The Mongols emerged as a world power in the early 1200s under Ghenghis Khan (d. 1227), and they swept westward across the Asian steppes into Eastern Europe and south into Persia, eventually conquering Baghdad in 1258. The conquest was welcomed by Christians who saw the Mongols as liberators from Islam. The Mongols, with Christians among their ranks, moved on to capture Damascus in 1260, and local Christians again welcomed this as a victory over Islam. Christian jubilation was short-lived, however, as later in 1260 Mamluk armies defeated the Mongols at 'Ain Jalut in Palestine. Mongol armies invaded Syria several more times into the early 1300s but were repelled by the Mamluks. Mongol efforts to form an alliance with the Christian west against the Mamluk state also failed. The Mongols eventually converted to Islam, but this did nothing to endear them to the Mamluk regime (Morgan 1986; Baum and Winkler 2003; Bundy 1996).

The Copts in Egypt fared reasonably well under the Ayyubids and Mamluks through the Crusades and the Mongol invasions. However, the fourteenth century saw a sharp reversal of their fortunes as the Mamluks turned inward to shore up their Islamic credentials. Elite Copts played a prominent role in the running of the Mamluk bureaucracy, and their ostentatious displays of wealth provoked protests among the Muslim masses in the early 1300s and then riots in 1321. The 1321 riots involved the burning of sixty churches and monasteries and a counter-wave of mosque burnings. The Mamluk Sultan typically sought to appease the Muslim masses by imposing the Pact of 'Umar. Christians for example had to wear blue turbans and Jews yellow turbans, and non-Muslims in the administration had to convert to Islam or lose their posts. Enforcement of these measures was short-lived, and Copts returned to their positions with the passing of hostilities, paving the way for another round of Muslim protests. This cycle came to an end when Coptic ostentation again triggered riots in 1354 leading to Christian deaths and church burnings. The Mamluks responded much more harshly this time, confiscating Christian pious endowments and breaking the back of Coptic power in the bureaucracy. Conversion reduced the Christian proportion of the population to the roughly 6–10 percent that is found in Egypt today (Little 1976).¹¹ The Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 did little to improve the situation of the Copts, but over time they developed contacts with the west through Catholic and, later on, Protestant missionaries, and some leading Copts attained positions of influence with the ruling authorities and

¹¹ Little suggests that the Muslim masses targeted Copts in the Mamluk administration as scapegoats for oppressive Mamluk policies, but he says that demonstrating this would require a more extensive study. While much has been made of the Copts' demographic decline under the Mamluks, Swanson 2010, 129–32, highlights the resilience of the Coptic Orthodox Church in enabling the Copts to survive.

were able to intervene on behalf of their poorer coreligionists as needed (Armanios 2011).¹²

In Syria Christians bore Mamluk repercussions for supporting the invading Mongols, and the Christian communities of both Syria and Iraq suffered much loss at the hands of Tamerlane's devastating invasions in the late 1300s. By the time of the Ottoman invasion of Syria in 1516, Muslims and non-Muslims had little in common apart from daily commerce. Ottoman policy solidified this by encouraging clear separation of religious communities: Muslims were superior, and for most Muslims Christians lay outside the bounds of their social and political concern. However, Christians in Aleppo gradually caught Muslim attention by working with emerging European trading missions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and affiliating with the Catholic Church in Rome. The Ottoman rulers then favored the Greek Orthodox Church in the 1700s and gave them political privileges to counter the rising Catholic influence. Most Syrian Christians remained poor, but the increasing power of the Syrian Christian merchant elite disturbed Muslims' sense of their superior place in society and contributed to spasms of violence in Syria and Lebanon in the mid-1800s (Masters 2001, 16-168).

The 1800s also saw the Ottoman government press forward with modernization in order to keep up with increasing European power to the west. Moreover, the Ottomans issued the Hatt-i Humayun under European pressure in 1856 abolishing the *dhimmi* status of their non-Muslim minorities and regulations going back to the Pact of 'Umar. Islam remained the state religion of the Ottoman Empire, but Muslims and non-Muslims were now granted equal status as citizens. Muslims generally did not welcome this reform as they saw local Christian ascendancy coming at their expense (Masters 2001, 137-40, 161-63).¹³ Power continued to slip from Muslim hands as the British eventually took control of Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine and the French took Syria, Lebanon, and North Africa. What was left of the Ottoman Empire became the modern secular state of Turkey in 1923. Syrian Christians led the way in promoting Arab nationalism to replace Ottoman and European colonial rule. Arab nationalism as a movement of secular Muslim and Christian elites was largely successful, leading to the eventual independence of modern Arab states in the mid-twentieth century. Almost all of these states had clear Muslim majorities, and Islam was seen as integral to what it meant to be Arab on at least the cultural level. That aside, Arab nationalism provided more room for Christians in the public sphere than they had enjoyed for centuries.

¹² Hamilton 2006, examines the role of Catholic missionaries in Egypt and seeks to neutralize earlier historiography presenting Copts as little more than an isolated and persecuted minority. Sharkey 2008 examines Protestant mission in Egypt.

¹³ The proportion of Christians in the Fertile Crescent (but not Egypt) also tripled from the late 1500s to the early 1900s, only to decline again to earlier levels through the course of the 20th century. On this, see Fargues 1998, 48-66.

The 1917 British Balfour Declaration promising Palestine to the Jews as a homeland and the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in Palestine in 1948 constituted the height of imperial imposition in the eyes of both Christian and Muslim Arabs. Arab opposition to Israel was unsuccessful, and Israel's defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 Six-Day War dealt Arab nationalism a major setback. Muslims turned increasingly to Islam as the way forward in subsequent decades. The Islamic revival of the 1970s onward has created an increasingly uncertain environment for Christians as they wonder whether they can find a *modus vivendi* with an assertive Islamist agenda. This is especially so when Islamic extremism rears its head. The 2003 American military intervention in Iraq may have successfully removed Saddam Hussein from power. However, it also opened a Pandora's box of sectarian strife and had the unintended effect of decimating Iraq's Christians as al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia forced them to pay the *jizya* tax, drove them out of their homes, or killed them (Amos 2010, 24-29). Christians in other parts of the Arab world rarely face this level of immediate threat. Nonetheless, they cannot evade the question of how to position themselves in their Muslim contexts. Do they trust Muslims to give them the legal and political provisions that they need to live well? Or do they resist Muslim assertiveness in the name of a distinctly Christian political identity (Sabra 2006)?

The formation of modern Lebanon casts these questions into sharp relief as the Maronites opted for the second approach. Like the Catholic merchants of Syria, the Maronite Christians of Mount Lebanon prospered in the 1800s politically, economically, and culturally. In 1920 the French—apparently under Maronite pressure—created a much larger Lebanon than had ever been conceived before. To Mount Lebanon was annexed the traditionally Sunni coastal cities of Tripoli, Sidon, and Beirut, as well as the heavily Shi'i regions of the Biqa' Valley to the east and Jabal 'Amil to south. The result was the borders of present-day Lebanon. The new entity provided a far more robust economic base than Mount Lebanon alone, but with a population that was barely majority Christian.

Muslims were not pleased to be absorbed into a majority Christian state, but moderating leadership on both the Christian and Sunni sides paved the way to the Lebanese National Pact and full Lebanese independence from France in 1943. Although the Pact affirmed Christian dominance in politics with the president a Maronite, it defined Lebanon as Arab and gave Muslims partnership with Christians in the running of the country. However, later presidents asserted the Christian character of the country more strongly, abused their powers to amass wealth and influence, and marginalized Muslim participation in government. This, along with the arrival of the Palestinian Liberation Organization following its expulsion from Jordan in 1971, led to the Lebanese civil war of 1975–1990 (Zamir 1985; Trablousi 2007).

The Ta'if Accord that ended the civil war sharply curtailed the authority of the Maronite president, shifted more power to the Sunni prime minister, and scaled back the

ratio of Christian/Muslim representation in Parliament from 6/5 to 5/5. The back of Christian power was broken even if Christian precedence remained in name. However these adjustments failed to consider the rise of the Lebanese Shi'is from the dregs of society—in the eyes of the Christians and the Sunnis—to a powerful demographic, political, and military force from the 1970s to the present. In 2008 the Shi'i Hizbullah established itself decisively as the primary military and political power in Lebanon. Neither Sunnis nor Christians are inclined to grant Shi'is larger representation in Lebanon's parliament as long as Shi'i political leadership is primarily clerical rather than secular. Yet, this blockage in the Lebanese political structure only serves to stoke further frustration in the Shi'i community.

Peacemaking among Muslims and Christians in the Arab World Today

This historical survey of Christian-Muslim relations in the Arab world has focused on the military, the political, and the social. That is of course not the whole story. Next to nothing has been said about the rich spirituality and strong morality found among both Muslims and Christians in the region, and little has been noted of the largely peaceful day-to-day sharing of life between the two communities. Yet, apart from the Jewish dominated state of Israel and Lebanon, which is politically half-Christian/half-Muslim, that daily interaction takes place within a context of Muslim demographic and political dominance gained through a long history of competition with external and internal rivals and persistent belief in God's sanction. Moreover, following the decline of Arab nationalism as an ideological force, Islam has become the primary civil religion both *de jure* and *de facto*. No other more inclusive civil religion is on offer, and secular visions of political life have insufficient traction to achieve precedence.

So, the question at this moment in history is not whether Christians and Muslims in the Arab world will live together within Islamic polities. Rather, it is a matter of what kind of Islamic polities these will be. This is a crucial question facing those aspiring to peacemaking among Christians and Muslims in the region. Given the history of Christian *dhimmi* status to the mid-1800s, Christians are understandably apprehensive with increasing Islamization. However, the Islam of the past need not be the Islam of the future. Muslims could leave aside belief that peace comes through coercion and the narrative of Islamic precedence that supports it in favor of more life-affirming peacemaking paradigms that stress equity, conciliation, and nonviolence (Funk and Said 2009). Additionally, *dhimmi* regulations, the *jizya* tax, and the Pact of 'Umar could be shelved permanently as historical artifacts unessential to Islamic politics in favor of egalitarian notions of citizenship and human rights. Finally, Islam could be conceived as most fundamentally communal rather than territorial, freeing Muslims from the need to

tie Islam to the fates of particular states and nations. Some Muslims readily embrace and advocate these proposals while others vehemently reject them. Yet others try to find some kind of middle way. As for Christians in the region, some are skeptical that such proposals could ever prevail in the long run, while others are more sanguine. Peacemaking among Christians and Muslims in the Arab world must be alert to the debate over these issues and open to the ongoing process of negotiating what Islam means in contemporary society, not just what it has meant to past generations. The Christian communities as well face the task of discerning their contributions to peacemaking in society and envisioning new ways of interacting with Muslims that rise above destructive patterns of the past.

Many Muslims and Christians in the Arab world are actively involved in peacemaking to reconcile enemies and overcome barriers to more just and equitable societies, and it is worth mentioning a few of these efforts. A wide array of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some secular and some religious, seek to build bridges between religious communities and offer essential services to those in need. Prominent in this regard is the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) in Egypt (Makari 2007). Pre-civil war Lebanon provided the incubator for interreligious dialogue efforts spearheaded by the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, and post-civil war Lebanon hosts perhaps the richest dialogue culture in the region with nearly all major confessions initiating discussions. The Muslim-initiated *A Common Word* coming out of Jordan in 2007 evoked much fruitful dialogue with English-speaking Christians in the West, although it had regrettably little impact within the Arab world (Hoover 2009). Given the integral role that religion plays in Arab political identity, it is perhaps inevitable that politicians also initiate interreligious dialogue. In 2008 for example King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia launched a dialogue effort to bring religions together around universal values essential to them all (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2008).

Interreligious dialogue in the Arab world often suffers from miscommunication as Muslims and Christians bring different agendas to the table. Research on Syria before the 2011 uprising observes that Muslim religious leaders typically enter dialogue seeking to improve the image of Islam and decry fanaticism and immorality, while Christians more often hope to identify common theological ground and nurture neighborly love (Szanto 2008; Scheffler 2007). Despite such difficulties, it is essential that Christians and Muslims meet to talk and share life. This provides opportunity to bear witness to the truth as each understands it, negotiate difference peaceably and equitably, and develop solidarity across communal lines.

Music, the focus of the present volume, is one of many realms of life around which Christians and Muslims in the Arab world can and do gather for conversation. Music of many different kinds permeates Arab society, from heavy metal rock to the powerful love

songs of the Lebanese diva Fairuz (Levine 2008; Stone 2008), but it is perhaps fitting to close this chapter by describing an event in Lebanon sponsored by the [un]Common Sounds project that brought together Christians and Muslims to share in specifically religious music. Gathering Muslims and Christians around religious music is not a straightforward undertaking. While music and musical instruments are integral to worship for most Christians, they are not part of the central Muslim rituals of five daily prayers and Friday mosque attendance, and some Muslims associate music and its emotive power with folly and vice. Nonetheless, Sufi and Shi'i Muslims have developed music for devotional purposes to varying degrees. The repertoire of Shi'i music is especially rich in commemorating the tragic martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala' in Iraq in 680, and many Sufis have long used music as an aid to heighten religious feeling in their recollection of God (*dhikr*).

The Songs of Divine Love concert held in Beirut on April 3, 2009 as part of the (un)Common Sounds Songs of Peace and Reconciliation Colloquium featured similar Sufi and eastern Christian traditions of cantillation and mystical spirituality. The audience was treated to powerful renditions of several Sufi favorites: the well-known hadith, "I was a Hidden Treasure, and I longed to be known. So, I created the creatures that I might be known"; the famous Qur'anic Light Verse, "God is the light of the heavens and the earth . . ." (Qur'an 24:34); and verses from great Sufi poets such as Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235) and Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240). On the Christian side were moving performances of poems and hymns from church fathers such as St. Roman the Melodist (d. 551) and St. Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1024) and an entrancing cantillation of St. Paul's love hymn, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love . . ." (1 Cor 13). At an interlude in the musical program, the prominent Lebanese Shi'i religious scholar Shaykh Shafiq Jaradeh spoke on the elevated communion with God that both Christians and Muslims seek.

This concert cut across many of the usual religious boundaries in Lebanon. The concert was hosted by the Near East School of Theology, a Lebanese Protestant seminary, and it brought together Lebanese Christians, Sunnis, and Shi'is of different persuasions, as well as several foreign visitors participating in the Songs of Peace and Reconciliation Colloquium. While everyone present at the Songs of Divine Love concert could surely appreciate the quality of the music, differences were apparent. The restraint and refinement of the Christian hymns contrasted with the emotive and exuberant improvisation in the cantillation of the Sufi poetry, and the music evoked far deeper resonances for those rooted in Arab culture than those of western culture. It also could not be taken for granted that everyone welcomed the mystical love spirituality that was celebrated. For some, the theology articulated may have bordered on the heretical. Nonetheless, even for skeptics the event provided opportunity to learn of the riches in the Christian and Islamic mystical and musical traditions and to meet, greet and nurture

relationships that engender forbearance and amicable negotiation of religious and political difference.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Identify historical episodes of violence and nonviolence within this chapter's broad overview of Christian-Muslim interaction in the Arab world. How has history repeated itself within a contemporary perspective? Which historical patterns, do you believe, could assist in fostering peace in today's contexts?
2. Compare and contrast the social, political, and religious climates of Egypt and Lebanon as described in this chapter. What were the most important historical events or leaders that have influenced these countries today? Use current news to give support to your argument.
3. "The Islam of the past need not be the Islam of the future." Discuss this perspective from the chapter's conclusions by reflecting on how various Christian and Muslim sects living both inside and outside the Middle East and North Africa might respond.
4. **PROJECT:** Interview several Christians and/or Muslims living in your area, asking them to identify any historical events they know about that have significantly influenced contemporary Christian-Muslim relations. Are these the same events as those in this chapter? If not, why are these events remembered in your area more than others? Analyze these reasons and share your conclusions with your class or study group.

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